



Buffalo Tales



Volume 21, No. 6 Buffalo County Historical Society November-December, 1998

KEARNEY 100 YEARS AGO PART II

by Mardi Anderson

1898

The Same but Different

In some ways Kearney has not changed in the past century. We still have winds like the one that blew roofs off some kilns at the Hibberd Brickyard, located at the site of the present day Kearney Catholic football field. Today people lament the loss of historic old buildings which have been torn down. One hundred years ago we read about "Very Few Old Buildings Left On Central Avenue - Another landmark has been moved away. Within the past year housemovers have moved away a very large number of old landmarks . . . Fire and the heavy hand of time has assisted in the wreck, and buildings on Central Avenue a quarter of a century old are scarce. In the building and rebuilding of a city old landmarks rapidly disappear, and at the rate they have been taken away in the last year it will not be long until the oldest landmark will be of comparatively recent origin."

The price of grain was important then as now. In February, 1898 the price of wheat was 71½ cents per bushel, and by May it was up to \$1.10. At that point the guards around the elevators had doubled.



Possibly the first celery raised in Nebraska was that by J. H. Black on his farms south of Kearney. Several stalks were prominently displayed at the fair.

CHRISTMAS TREE EXTRAVAGANZA - December 5 to 13 - 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

WITH THE SOCIETY

A NOTE FROM THE PRESIDENT:

The Christmas Season is approaching, and it will soon be a new year. 1998 has been a historic year for the Kearney area. The all-year celebration of the Quasquicentennial created a renewed interest in our local history through its projects, programs and special events.

It has been a successful year for the Buffalo County Historical Society, climaxed by our contract with the Kearney Area Community Foundation and Marge Lauer to assist in our fund-raising efforts for a new multi-purpose building. If you would like to make a contribution, please contact a member of the Board of the Historical Society or Marge Lauer at the Foundation office.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, and personally, I wish for you a Merry and Blessed Christmas and a Happy 1999.

Wilma Harder, President



NEW BASIC MEMBER

John Pflug, Kearney

For Christmas Giving

Tales of Buffalo County, Volumes I-V. Researched stories of local history published by BUFFALO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY, paperback, illustrated and indexed. \$10.00 per volume (plus \$1.00 if mailed); \$45.00 for set of five (plus \$2.50 if mailed).

**On sale at Trails & Rails Museum,
Phone (308) 234-3041
ABC Drug and MONA, Kearney Centre
read all about it, Hilltop Mall
Hastings Books, 9 West 39th Street**

Gift Memberships

Basic / Family	\$15.00 per year
Institutional / Business	\$20.00 per year
Supporting / Contributing	\$30.00 + per year
Individual	\$150.00
Husband & Wife	\$200.00

Send membership or book orders, with payment, to:

**BUFFALO COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
P.O. Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848**

Shop at the Museum Gift Shop

Oregon Trail books, cookbooks, new books, and many train souvenirs such as banks, Christmas Trains, collector spoons, key chains, whistles, pencil sharpeners, color books and much, much more.

Today transcontinental trains come through Kearney at the rate of over forty trains per day, but only on the Union Pacific track. Then, Kearney was served by two railroads - the Union Pacific and the Burlington, as well as a Union Pacific branch from Kearney northwest to Callaway. Fourteen UP trains stopped in Kearney every day. The most popular for going from one town to another seemed to be the Fast Mail. "Bishop Graves came home this morning on the fast mail from a trip west." "Miss Connor went down to Grand Island this morning on the fast mail." "F. H. Gilcrest went down the road this morning on the fast mail on a business trip."

City Sidewalks and Other Council Issues

One of the issues which faced the city council in the spring of 1898 was that of sidewalks. Our city's leaders wanted permanent sidewalks, whether brick, gravel or cement. It was advertised that the city would furnish the labor for construction, the land owner had to buy the material. Then came the problem of sidewalk thefts - boards were being taken from the walks. Council members suggested offering rewards or putting wire with staples along the edges. The city attorney was instructed to see if there were any ordinances covering the issue.

The street and alley committee recommended brick sidewalks as being the cheapest and most durable because brick could be obtained in Kearney made by local labor, it was inexpensive, didn't need to be repaired as often, and there was less injury to those using them, resulting in fewer damage suits. An ordinance was to be drawn up.

Hibberd advertised that he was specializing in paving brick at a price less than lumber for sidewalks. A lumber dealer told the Hub that good white pine is cheaper and wears better than a single layer of brick.

Late in May "[t]he first case involving damages from a defective sidewalk, against the city, which has been defeated, was settled in District Court today. Lavina Johnston...sued the city, claiming damages sustained by falling on the sidewalk in front of Pickering's store. The case was conducted by City Attorney McDonald, assisted by Mayor Hostetler [a lawyer by profession], and it was proven beyond question that the city was not responsible for the damages sustained by the fall, and that the walk was



Picture of businesses on Central Avenue with board sidewalks in front. City Council dealt with the issue of sidewalk thefts - boards were being taken from the walks.

not defective.”

Among other ordinances passed by the city council a century ago was one which required a bond and permit for moving buildings “over or on any street or alley of the City”. The dog ordinance (which was not described) was replaced by one which levied a dog tax of \$1, and called for all stray worthless curs to be killed while the valuable ones were to be auctioned off. No description was given of “worthless” or “valuable”.

Kearney Industries

The cotton mill, located west of Kearney, was still in operation. It was hard to tell just how things were going at the mill. One day in January the paper announced, “The cotton mill is running with plenty of water in the canal, cotton in abundance and all the help they need and more arriving every day. The people here look happy and I notice that the merchants from Kearney, when they come out (as they always do after pay day) have a smile on their face when they go back.” The next day the Hub was informed that “notices have been posted in the cotton mill stating that the wages of all employees will be reduced on next Monday.” Later in the spring the “cotton mill people” purchased the bankrupt Kearney Canal property. The Hub assured its readers that “[t]his insures not only the development and improvement of the Kearney canal, but also the permanence of the Kearney cotton mills and their workings in the future to a full capacity.”

The celery fields, located south of Kearney between the city and the Platte River, were another issue. Henderson Black operated the largest field, which he planned to increase to 50 acres for the 1898 growing season. Estimates for total acreage to be planted varied from 100 to 150 acres with some new growers entering the business. The fields were fertilized with manure from the barns in Kearney.

Most of the celery, nearly a hundred carloads, was shipped out by rail, mainly to Omaha and Kansas City. Growers were optimistic that the demand would be even higher this year, especially if they escaped the hail that had ruined part of the crop the previous year.

In June, 1898, there was general unrest among laborers and a labor union was formed in Kearney which was asking for daily wages of \$1.25. It was started by laborers in the celery fields who went on strike.

The Younger Generation

The Class of '98 graduated from Kearney High School on the evening of Friday, May 27. Graduation exercises were held at the Kearney Opera House. Professor S. G. Pattison, president of Hastings College, gave the graduation address. There were 22 seniors who graduated. The girls wore white and the boys wore black “as usual”.

We've all heard the term “dog & pony show”. Well, there really was one shortly after school let out for the summer of 1898. Professor Gentry's school of performing dogs and ponies came to Kearney. Following the performance children would be allowed to ride the ponies and pet the dogs. This dog and pony show was somewhat delayed when the anticipated day arrived because of a late train and then high winds which prevented the raising of the tent. The evening show went on as planned however.

In the heat of summer, what better way to cool off than to go swimming? A sign was posted by Kearney's police chief Overmire at the bridge over the first channel south of Kearney on Central warning boys and other persons not to swim there in the pool formed by the irrigation ditch dam. Apparently several lads had been seen swimming nude. “The chief asks all parties seeing boys in the pond in a nude condition to file a complaint or give their names to him.”

Some Legal and Moral Issues

A “wandering wayfarer” who gave his name as Ryan was arrested for stealing underwear from the Black Flag store in January. He was sentenced to 30 days in the

county jail by Judge Squires of the police court. The prisoner was thankful for the sentence because this would get him through the hardest part of the winter weather. It was not unusual for city police to find and arrest "wanderers" who would spend the night in jail and then be escorted to the city limits the next morning.

The Anti-Saloon League held meetings early in the year in Kearney. In January they met at the Methodist Church with the overflow meeting at the Congregational Church. Speeches called for a vote in the Spring against the saloon, the gambling hall and the brothel. When they met the following month at Trinity Methodist, the overflow crowd went to the Evangelical Church. An estimated 1,000 people attended.

Next, the Anti-Saloon League went to the city council to ask for inclusion on the ballot these two statements: "for saloon license" and "against saloon license". The council agreed and in April a non-binding popular opinion poll vote on saloon licensing tallied 425 for and 407 against.

By the end of April "the exodus of gamblers and scarlet women was about concluded, the larger part of them having left the city." In late May the newspaper announced that "[o]ne of the houses of ill fame on the bottoms will be closed for good this week, the proprietor and his wife moving to Hastings. Neither of them have been running since Mayor Hostetler has been inaugurated."

Whose Bones?

Saloon keeper, John Rath, decided to make some improvements in the rear of the bowling alley on the south side of his establishment. He had called in Mr. Smead, a carpenter, and the two were conferring about the work to be done near the bowling alley pit when they noticed a box. Mr. Rath did not know what was in the box but he joked that if it was full of gold they would split it. After poking around they were able to loosen one end of the box and bones spilled out.

Thinking this might be a serious matter, the men called Dave Crable, a harness maker next door, and William Knaggs, another prominent Kearney business man. Mr. Knaggs suggested calling the coroner, Costello, who scheduled an inquest for that evening.

News traveled fast, as might be expected at such a mysterious and exciting find. There was a great amount of speculation as to whose bones these were. Past disappearances were brought to mind and discussed. The most noted disappearance was that of a one-armed character known as "Captain Jack" some twenty years earlier. Mention was also made of the time some years back when the Cornelius family had operated the saloon and "Moxy" Cornelius was a medical student. There was speculation that this was a corpse he might have been studying.

A coroner's jury of six men heard the evidence. Dr. Bell testified after examining the bones that they had been trimmed by a medical student who "understood the business." Cap Cornelius testified that Moxy and another medical student had two skeletons, a woman and a child. Jack Wilkerson testified that he also had seen the bones in the possession of Moxy Cornelius and that after Moxy left, Jake Cornelius had hidden the box under the building. The jury concluded that these were not the bones of a complete skeleton since the skullbones and one hand were missing and that there was no doubt the bones were those owned by the two medical students and left behind when they left town.

SOURCES

Sources for article: *Kearney Daily Hub*, 1898, *Kearney City Directories*, 1892-3 and 1910.
Source of pictures: Buffalo County Historical Society archives.

BUFFALO TALES is the official publication of the Buffalo County Historical Society, a non-profit organization, whose address is P. O. Box 523, Kearney, NE 68848-0523.

1998 Annual dues, payable January 1, are:

- Basic Membership \$15.00
- Institutional Membership \$20.00
- Supporting Membership \$30.00 +

Life memberships are \$150.00 for an individual; \$200.00 husband and wife.

Directors

Term expiring June 1, 1999: Wilma Harder, Helen Kinnaman, Margaret Hohnholt and Dick Ikenberry.

Term expiring June 1, 2000: Minnette Steinbrink, Susan Underhill, Pauline Wells, and Dora Day.

Term expiring June 1, 2001: Edward Anderson, Wilma Larsen, Janeen Vokoun, and a vacancy to be appointed by the Board.

Officers (1 year term)

- President Wilma Harder
- Vice-President Susan Underhill
- Secretary Janeen Vokoun
- Treasurer Mardi Anderson

TRAILS & RAILS MUSEUM

Even though the Museum is closed for the season, much is happening. We are continuing to work on the Boyd House and it is looking great. Scout troops, both Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts have been visiting. There are several out-of-town Senior Groups who have made reservations to visit during the Christmas Tree Extravaganza.

The committee is now working hard at decorating and getting ready for the Christmas trees. We will be open on December 2nd and 3rd for those decorating trees. On Friday, the 4th, the committee will be finalizing our plans. We will open December 5 at 1:00 p.m. and be open each day through the 13th. On Monday, the 14th, the trees will be taken down and all volunteers who helped in any way are invited to a Christmas tea.

We also hold a bake sale during the time of the Walk and you are all invited to bring a baked goodie for sale. You may also buy specials for gifts or to enjoy yourself. There will be fresh goodies each day.

We hope you can all come. If you haven't joined us you have missed a nice start to the Christmas Season. If you have been here before, you know the trees are very different each year. **COME AND SEE FOR YOURSELF.**

—Margaret Hohnholt, Volunteer Director

Trails & Rails Museum 706 West 11th Street (308) 234-3041

Buffalo County Historical Society

Box 523

Kearney, NE 68848-0523

Address Correction Requested

L
VIVLIAN M BLOMENKAMP
1023 FOREST AVE
PALO ALTO CA 94301

Non-Profit Organization Bulk Rate	U.S. Postage PAID Postal Permit No. 7 Kearney, Nebraska
--------------------------------------	--